

## XXIV

### HOW THEY TOOK VITACHUCO, AND THE OUTBREAK OF THE BATTLE THAT OCCURRED BETWEEN THE INDIANS AND THE SPANIARDS

The men of both sides having been ordered out, then, as has been said, the Spaniards advanced handsomely equipped, armed, and in battle array, formed in squadrons, the cavalry and the infantry separate. In order to pretend more convincingly that he did not know of the Indians' treason, the governor decided to go out on foot with the curaca.

Near the pueblo was a large plain. On one side was a high and dense forest that covered a large tract of land, and on the other were two lakes. The first was small, and would measure about a league in circumference; it was clear of growth and mud, but so deep that three or four steps from the shore one could not touch bottom. The second, which was farther away from the pueblo, was very large, more than half a league in breadth and so long that it looked like a large river, its extent being unknown. The Indians stationed their squadron between the forest and these two lakes, the lakes being on their right and the forest on their left. They would number almost ten thousand warriors, chosen men, brave and of fine appearance. On their heads were long plumes, their chief adornment, placed and arranged so that they extended up half a fathom high; with them the Indians appear taller than they really are.

They had their bows and arrows on the ground covered with grass, in order to make it appear that as friends they were unarmed. The squadron was drawn up with all military precision, not square but elongated, the files straight and somewhat open with two projecting wings at the sides, arranged in such good order that certainly it was a fine thing to see.<sup>7</sup> The Indians waited for Vitachuco, their lord, and Hernando de Soto to come out to see them. They came on foot, each accompanied by twelve of his men, both

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<sup>7</sup>A cross-shaped military squadron formation, i.e., oblong and with "wings," was also described and illustrated by Jacques Le Moyne in the 1560s. A similar native formation is documented for the interior Mississippian chiefdom of Coosa. Stefan Lorant, *The New World: The First Pictures of America* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1946), 63; Charles Hudson, "A Spanish-Coosa Alliance in Sixteenth-Century North Georgia," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (1988):612-15.

with the same purpose and desire, one against the other. At the governor's right hand came the Spanish squadrons, the infantry adjoining the forest, and the cavalry in the middle of the plain.

The governor and the cacique having reached the spot where Vitachuco had said he would give the signal for the Indians to seize the general, the general gave it first, so that his adversary who was playing the same game should not win the first hand, by which he would gain this contest that was in progress between them. He had an harquebus fired, which was the signal for his men. Alonso de Carmona says that the signal was the sounding of a trumpet; it might have been both.

The twelve Spaniards who were near Vitachuco seized him, and though the Indians who came between them wished to defend him and attempted to do so, they could not release him from his captivity.

Hernando de Soto, who was secretly armed and had near him two horses led by the reins, mounted one of them, a dappled gray that they had named Azeituno because Mateo de Azeituno (who we said above had gone to rebuild La Havana and had remained there as alcalde of the fortress he was to found, the one that the city and port now has, which this gentleman founded, though not with its present grandeur and magnificence) had given it to him, and it was a most brave and handsome animal, worthy of having had such masters. The governor mounting, then, he charged the squadron of Indians and reached it ahead of all the other Castilians, both because he was nearer the squadron and because this brave captain in all the battles and encounters that occurred, by day or by night, in this conquest and in that of El Perú, always managed to be among the first. He was one of the four best lances that have passed to or are now in the West Indies, and although his captains often complained to him for exposing his person to too much danger and risk, because the safety of the whole army lay in the preservation of his life and health, as its head, and though he saw that they were right, he could not restrain his warlike spirit nor did he enjoy victories unless he were the first in winning them. Leaders ought not to be so bold.

The Indians, who now already had their arms in their hands, received the governor with the same spirit and gallantry he showed, and they did not allow him to break many of the files of the squadron, because on reaching the first ones, of the many arrows they shot at him eight reached the mark, all of them striking the horse. As we shall see in the course of this *History*, these Indians always attempted to kill the horses first, rather than the riders, because of the advantage they gave them. They pierced him with four arrows

in the breast and four in the knees, two on each side, with such skill and savagery that without his moving a foot, as if they had shot him in the forehead with a piece of artillery, they struck him down dead.

Hearing the harquebus-shot, the Spaniards attacked the Indian squadron, following their captain-general. The horses came so near him that they were able to succor him before the enemy did him any further harm. One of his pages, one Viota, a native of Zamora and an hidalgo, dismounted from his horse and gave it to him, helping him to mount. The governor charged again against the Indians, who, unable to resist the impetus of three hundred horses together, as they had no pikes, turned and ran, without giving much proof of their strength and bravery, quite contrary to the opinion their cacique and they themselves had held shortly before, it appearing impossible to them that so few Spaniards could overcome so many and such brave Indians as they thought themselves to be.

Their squadron routed, the Indians fled to the nearest cover they could find. One large band of them entered the woods, thereby saving their lives. Many others threw themselves into the large lake where they escaped death. Others, who were the rear guard and were far from shelter, ran forward across the plain where more than three hundred were killed by lances, and some, though few, were taken prisoners.

Those in the vanguard, who were the best and as such always bear the brunt of battle, were more unfortunate because they received the first attack and the greatest impetus of the horses, and unable to reach the woods or the large lake, which were the best shelters, more than nine hundred of them threw themselves into the small lake. Such was the first outcome of Vitachuco's boasting. The encounter took place at nine or ten o'clock in the morning.

The Spaniards followed close after them in all directions until they entered the woods and the large lake, but seeing that however they tried they could not capture a single Indian, they all came back and gathered at the small lake where, as we said, more than nine hundred Indians had taken refuge. They fought them all day in order to induce them to surrender, more with threats and intimidation than with arms, shooting crossbows and harquebuses to frighten them but not to kill them, because, as people almost overcome and unable to flee, they did not wish to harm them.

Throughout the day the Indians did not stop shooting arrows at the Castilians, until they exhausted their supply, and to enable them to shoot from the water, as they could not get a foothold, one Indian would climb up on three or four others who would swim close together and support him until

he used up the arrows of his whole party. In this manner they kept up all day, not one of them surrendering.

When night came the Spaniards surrounded the lake, stationing themselves at intervals in groups of two on horseback and of six infantry, near one another, so that the Indians would not escape in the darkness. Thus they continued to harass them, not allowing them to set foot on the bank, and when they heard them approach it they shot at them to force them back so that, tired of swimming, they would surrender more easily. On one hand they threatened them with death if they did not give themselves up, and on the other they promised pardon, peace and friendship to those who were willing to receive it.

## XXV

### OF THE SLOW SURRENDER OF THE CONQUERED INDIANS, AND THE CONSTANCY OF SEVEN OF THEM

As much as the Castilians persecuted the Indians who were in the lake, they could not prevent them from showing their spirit and strength. Although they recognized the difficulty and danger in which they were, without hope of assistance, they chose death as a lesser evil than showing weakness in that adversity.

They persisted in this obstinacy until midnight, not one of them being willing to give up, and they had passed fourteen hours in the water. From that time on, by means of the many persuasions of Juan Ortiz and of the four Indian interpreters who were with him, and by means of the promises and oaths they made them that their lives would be safe, the weakest ones began to come out and give themselves up, one by one, then two by two, so reluctantly that by daylight not fifty Indians had surrendered. At the persuasion of these latter, those in the water, seeing that they had not killed or otherwise harmed them but on the other hand, as they said, had treated them well, gave themselves up in larger numbers, though so slowly and unwillingly that many returned to the middle of the lake from near the banks, but the love of life drew them back again.

In this manner they continued to come out and surrender, distrustfully, until ten o'clock in the morning; then all who remained submitted at once,

about two hundred men, having passed twenty-four hours' time swimming in the water. It was very distressing to see them half-drowned, swollen with the large amount of water they had swallowed, and afflicted by the hardship, hunger, fatigue, and lack of sleep that they had suffered.

Only seven Indians remained in the lake, so pertinacious and obstinate that neither the entreaties of the interpreters nor the promises of the governor nor the example of those who had surrendered were sufficient to make them do the same. It seemed instead that they had recovered the spirit that the others had lost, and wished to die rather than be conquered. Forced to do so, they replied to what was said to them, and said that they neither wanted their promises nor feared their threats, nor death.

They continued in this constancy and fortitude until three o'clock in the afternoon and were about to expire when, at that hour, it seeming to the governor inhuman to allow men of such fortitude and virtue—qualities that we admire even in enemies—to perish, he ordered twelve Spaniards who were expert swimmers to enter the lake carrying their swords in their mouths—in imitation of Julius Caesar at Alexandria in Egypt, and of the few Spaniards who, performing this same feat in the River Elbe, overcame the duke of Saxony and all his League—and bring out the seven valiant Indians who were in it. The swimmers entered the water and, seizing them by the leg, arm, or hair, as the case might be, pulled them out until they dragged them on shore, so nearly drowned that they were almost unconscious. They lay stretched out on the sand in a state that may well be imagined of men who for nearly thirty hours, without setting foot on the ground (as apparently they did not) or receiving any other relief, had been contending against the water. Certainly it was an incredible exploit, which I would not dare write down if it were not certified to me on the authority of so many gentlemen and great men, in speaking in the Indies and in Spain of this and of other [exploits] that they saw in the course of this discovery; and there is besides the authority and truthfulness of him who gave me the account of this *History*, which is trustworthy in all respects.

And since we have mentioned the River Elbe it gives occasion for not passing on without referring to a very Catholic saying that the *maese de campo* Alonso Vivas (a brother of the good Doctor Luis Vivas), who was charged with guarding the duke of Saxony, said after that defeat. It was that, talking one day in the presence of the most gross and fierce Saxon of the miracles the images of Our Lady have performed in various parts of the world, the duke (as a man tainted by the heresies of Martin Luther) spoke these words: "In one of my towns there was an image of Mary, and they said

that it performed miracles; I had it thrown into the River Elbe but it did not work a single miracle." The *maese de campo*, offended by such evil words, came back very readily and said: "What greater miracle do you desire, Duke, than to have lost at this same river in the manner in which you did lose, so contrary to your hopes and to those of all your League?" The duke's head bowed until his beard rested on his chest and he did not raise it again all that day, nor did he come out of his lodgings for three days thereafter, from dismay and shame at that Catholic Spaniard's having convinced him of his infidelity and heresy by proving that that image of Our Lady had worked a miracle on his own person, which he had experienced to his own hurt. This story and many others of these times and of others still earlier, and later, were told to me by my uncle Don Alonso de Vargas, who was present and served throughout that expedition to Germany with the rank of *sargento mayor* in a Spanish regiment, calling himself Francisco de Plasencia, and afterward he was captain of cavalry.

The Spaniards, moved by pity and compassion for the hardships the seven Indians had suffered in the water, and admiring the fortitude and constancy of spirit they showed, took them to their lodgings and gave them every attention possible to bring them back to this life, with which, and with their good spirit, they were entirely restored by the following night, for all this time was needed to recover from their injuries.

When morning came the governor ordered them summoned and with a show of anger had them questioned as to the reason for their pertinacity and stubbornness; why, seeing themselves, as they were, without hope of succor, they had not been willing to surrender as the rest of their companions had done. Four of them were men about thirty-five years of age. They replied, first one and then another speaking, the last taking up the story where the other left it, being perturbed and not certain of how to go on. Again one of the silent ones would help with a word the speaker could not call to mind, which is the style of the Indians, who assist one another in discourses that they carry on with important persons before whom they are afraid of becoming confused.

Speaking after this fashion, then, the Indians replied to the governor, giving many and lengthy reasons, from which, in substance, it was understood that they had said the following: that they had seen very well the risk they ran of losing their lives and the little hope they had of being succored, but with all this it had seemed to them, and they regarded it as quite certain, that by surrendering they could in no way comply with the obligation of the offices and military rank they held; because, having been chosen in prosper-

ity by their prince and lord, honored and distinguished with the name and insignia of captains, since he regarded them as men of fortitude, spirit, and constancy, it was just that in adversity they should fulfill the obligations of their offices and show that they had not been unworthy of them, and prove to their curaca and lord that he had not been mistaken in choosing them.

Besides complying with their military obligations and with what they owed to their lord, they wished also to leave an example to their sons and successors and to all soldiers and warriors of how they ought to behave in such cases, particularly to those stationed and appointed as captains and superiors of the others, whose deeds of spirit and fortitude or of weakness and cowardice were more noticed, to be honored or condemned, than those of the common people, the base, and the humble, who had no honor or charge to fulfill.

For all these reasons and because it had come about that their lives were saved, as his lordship had seen, they were not satisfied that they had done their duty or complied with their obligations as captain and commander; therefore it would be a greater mercy and honor to have allowed them to die in the lake than to have spared their lives. Thus, not overlooking the kindness that he had done them, they begged his lordship to order their lives taken, because they would live in the world in great shame and dishonor and would never dare to appear before their lord, Vitachuco, who had so honored and esteemed them, if they did not die for him.

## XXVI

### WHAT THE GOVERNOR DISCUSSED WITH THE THREE INDIAN LORDS OF VASSALS AND WITH THE CURACA VITACHUCO

The four Indian captains having made the reply that has been described in the last chapter, the governor, not without admiration at hearing their reasons, turned his eyes to the other three, who had been silent. They were youths, none of them being over eighteen years old, and were sons of lords of vassals of Vitachuco's district and vicinity, heirs to their fathers' estates. In order to hear what they would say, he asked them why they, not being captains and having the obligations of the other four, had persisted in the same obstinacy and pertinacity. With a fortitude strange in prisoners and

with an aspect as composed as if they were free, assisting one another in their statements, the youths replied in their language the following words, which interpreted into Spanish run thus:

"The chief purpose that took us from the houses of our fathers, whose eldest sons we are, and future inheritors of their estates and seigniories, was not directly the desire for your death nor the destruction of your captains and army, although our intention could not be carried out without injury to you and to all of them. Neither were we impelled by the interest that those who engage in wars usually have in profiting from the sacking of pueblos and of conquered armies that generally takes place in the course of them, nor did we go out to serve our princes, so that gratified and obligated by our services they would afterward grant us favors in accordance with our merits. All these motives we lacked, for we needed none of these things.

"We left our homes with the desire to take part in the battle just passed solely through eagerness and ambition for honor and fame, because (as our fathers and teachers have taught us) that which is won in war is more valued and esteemed than anything else in this world. In this we were encouraged and incited by our neighbors and friends and for it we underwent the danger and fatigue in which you saw us yesterday, from which you rescued us through your clemency and pity. By the same token we are today your slaves.

"However, since fortune deprived us of the victory in which we thought to win the glory that we desired and gave it to you as one who better deserved it, and subjected us, on the contrary, to the misfortunes and hardships the conquered always suffer, it seems to us that we can gain from these same adversities, enduring them with the same spirit and strength that we felt in prosperity because, as our elders have told us, he who is loyal, though conquered, and who puts his life second to the honor of preserving the liberty of his country and his own, is no less deserving than the victorious conqueror who makes good use of his victory.

"We have been instructed by our fathers and relatives in all these things and many others. Therefore, though we hold no offices or military rank, it seemed to us that we were no less obligated than these four captains; rather we were more so, for fortune had chosen us for greater preeminence and rank, as we were to be lords of vassals. We wished to let the latter understand that we would endeavor to succeed to the estate of our fathers and predecessors by the same steps by which they arose to become lords, which were those of fortitude, constancy, and the other virtues that they possessed, with which they sustained their estates and seigniories. We also wished by our



deaths to console our parents and relatives, dying in order to do our duty as their kinsmen and sons.

"These were the reasons, invincible captain, why we took part in this enterprise and also the causes of the obstinacy and pertinacity you say we have shown, if the desire for honor and fame and the fulfillment of our obligation and natural duty can be so called. The latter is greater in princes, lords, and gentlemen, in accordance with their higher quality and rank, than in the common people.

"If this is sufficient for our acquittal, pardon us, Child of the Sun, for our obstinacy did not arise from disrespect toward you, but from what you have heard. If we do not deserve pardon, here you see our throats; do what most pleases you with our lives, which are yours, and nothing is prohibited to the conqueror."

Many of the Spaniards present, on hearing the last words and seeing youths so noble and so young placed in such affliction and able to speak in that manner, could not refrain from showing their compassion and tenderness to the point of revealing it in their eyes. The governor, who likewise had a merciful disposition, was also moved, and raising them up as if they were his own sons, he embraced all three together and then each one separately, and among many other fond words he said to them that in the fortitude they had in war and in the discretion they had shown besides they proved very clearly what they were, and that such men deserved to be lords of great states. He was much gratified at having known them and saved their lives, and it also gave him great pleasure to set them at liberty at once, so that they might be comforted and freed of the depression caused by their misfortune.

The governor kept them with him two days after this conversation, entertaining and caressing them constantly and seating them at his own table to eat, in order to win their fathers to his friendship and devotion, which honor the youths esteemed very highly. At the end of two days he sent them to their homes with presents of linen, cloth, silk, mirrors, and other things from Spain that he gave them for their fathers and mothers, and accompanied by some Indians of theirs who were found among the prisoners. He ordered them to tell their fathers what a good friend of theirs he had been, and would be to them also if they desired his friendship.

The young men, after thanking the governor for having spared their lives and for the favors he was doing them at present, went to their countries well satisfied, having many favorable things to tell there. The governor ordered the four captains to be kept in confinement so as to reprimand them, together with their cacique. Thus on the day after the departure of the young men

he had all five of them summoned, and he told them with serious words how ill they had done in having attempted to kill the Castilians under guise of peace and friendship, without the latter having harmed them in any way, for which they were deserving of an exemplary death that would be known throughout the world. But in order to show the natives of all that great kingdom that he did not wish to avenge himself for his injuries but to have peace and friendship with everyone, he would pardon them for their past crime so that they might be friends in the future, and since he on his part was showing himself to be such, he begged and charged them that, forgetting the past, they busy themselves with preserving their lives and property and not attempt to do anything else, for if they should make such an attempt it would succeed no better than the last one. He said many other things to the curaca privately in very friendly terms intended to mitigate the hatred and rancor that he felt toward the Christians, and he directed that he again eat at his table from which he had removed him hitherto as a punishment, ordering that he eat elsewhere.

But the arguments, caresses, presents, and many other things that the governor gave and said to Vitachuco not only did not have a good effect, such was the obstinacy and blindness of his passion, but they seemed rather to incite him to greater madness and wildness, for, dominated by fury and temerity, he was now incapable of all reasoning and of receiving advice, ungrateful and scornful of the pardon and the benefits conferred by the governor. Like a man doomed, governed by his passion, he did not stop short of his own destruction and death and that of his vassals, as we shall see presently.

## XXVII

### WHERE AN OBJECTION IS ANSWERED

Before going on with our *History*, it will be well to reply to an objection that could be made to us to the effect that in other histories of the West Indies there are not found actions and sayings of the Indians such as these we write here, for generally they are regarded as a simple people without reasoning power or understanding, and in peace and in war as little better than beasts; and accordingly it is thought that they could not say or do anything worthy of being remembered and praised, as some of them appear to have said hitherto and as will be told below, God willing. It might be supposed

also that we do this in an attempt to extol or praise our nation, for although the regions and countries are so far apart, it seems that all are the Indies.

To this is replied first that the opinion held of the Indians is inaccurate and entirely contrary to that which ought to be believed, as is noted, argued, and proved very well by the very venerable Father Joseph de Acosta in the first chapter of Book 6 of the *Historia natural y moral del Nuevo Orbe*, which I submit, in confirmation of the present work, to all who may wish to see, where there will be found the admirable things written by this very noted master. And in what concerns particularly our Indians and the accuracy of our *History*, as I said at the beginning, I write from the account of another who saw and took part in these things personally. He endeavored to be so faithful in his account that he corrected it chapter by chapter, as it was written, taking away what was excessive or adding what was missing in that which he had said. He did not consent to a word that was not his own, so that I did nothing more than hold the pen as clerk. I thus can deny truthfully that any of it is an invention of my own, for all my life I have been an enemy of fiction (with the exception of good poetry), such as books of knight errantry and other similar ones. For this I am indebted to that illustrious gentleman, Pedro Mexía of Sevilla, because with a reproof he drew from the heroic work of the Caesars of those who employ themselves in reading and composing such books, he took away the love that I might have had for them as a boy and made me abhor them for all time.

To say, then, that I write with exaggeration in order to praise my own nation because I am an Indian certainly is a mistake, for I confess with shame to the truth, namely, that I found myself lacking in the necessary words to recount and set down in order the facts of history that presented themselves, rather than with an abundance of them to invent things that did not happen. This want was due to the unhappy circumstances of my childhood, when there was a lack of schools of learning and a superabundance of schools of arms for both foot soldiers and cavalry, particularly horsemanship. In this last, because of our country's having been won with the saddle, my fellow students and I drilled ourselves from a very early age, to such an extent that many or all of them became famous horsemen. Thus we learned little more than the rudiments, which today I regard as most unfortunate, though the fault was not ours nor our parents', but it was simply that fortune had then nothing more to offer us, because the country was so recently won and because of the civil wars that at once arose between the Pizarros and the Almagros, down to those of Francisco Hernández Girón. Under these circumstances teachers of the sciences were lacking, and of those of arms there

were more than enough. Now in these days, through the mercy of God, the contrary is true, for the fathers of the holy Company of Jesus are founding so many schools of all the sciences that the universities of Spain are not needed.

Returning to our first purpose, which is to certify on the word of a Christian that in all the above we wrote the truth, and that with the aid of the Consummate Truth we shall write it in the future, I shall say that what took place was passed on to me by him who gave the account, and if I had not regarded him as an *hidalgo* and trustworthy, as he is, and as we shall tell afterward in other places with regard to his reputation, I would not presume to write all these truths as I do, certifying them to be such. I say, then, that coming to the reply that we have said the four Indian captains made to the governor, and then to that of the three young men, sons of lords of vassals, it appearing to me that the arguments (according to the common opinion that is held of the Indians) were too elaborate for barbarous Indians, I said to him: "According to the universal opinion concerning the Indians, it will not be believed that these arguments are theirs." He replied to me: "You know very well that the opinion is false and that it is not necessary to consider it; on the other hand it will be just to disprove it by telling the truth with regard to the matter, because as you yourself have seen and know there are Indians of very good understanding who in peace and in war and in times of adversity and of prosperity know how to speak as well as any other very cultivated nation.

"The Indians replied substantially what I have told you and used besides many other well-turned phrases that I do not recall—or, if I did, I could not remember how to say them as they themselves did—so that the governor and we who were with him wondered at their words and arguments more than at their feat of having continued swimming in the water for almost thirty hours. Many Spaniards, well read in history, said when they heard them that the captains appeared to have fought among the most famous ones of Rome when she dominated the world with her arms, and that the young lords of vassals seemed to have studied in Athens during her flourishing period of moral letters. Therefore as soon as they had made their replies and the governor had embraced them, there was no captain or soldier of note who did not embrace them most gladly, rejoicing at having heard them.

"For the same reason write what I have told you as fully as possible, and I promise you that however you may sharpen and consume your pen in praising the generosity and excellences of Muscoço, and the strength, constancy, and discretion of these seven Indian captains and lords of vassals, and how-

ever you may dwell upon the gallantry and ferocity of Vitachuco and of other chieftains whom we shall encounter later, you will not do justice to their nobility and exploits.

"Because of all this you may write without any scruples what I tell you, whether or not it may be believed; we comply with our obligation with having told the truth as to the things that took place, and doing otherwise would be to injure the parties concerned." All this passed between me and my author just as I have told it, and I include it here so that it may be understood and believed that we were attempting to write the truth rather with the lack of the elegance and rhetoric needful to place the events in their proper setting than with an excess of embellishment, because I was incapable of it. Since it will be necessary further on to reinforce our reputation and credit in other things as important, and more so, as we shall see, I shall say no more at present but shall return to our story.

## XXVIII

### CONCERNING THE RECKLESS ACTION THAT VITACHUCO ORDERED FOR THE PURPOSE OF KILLING THE SPANIARDS, AND THAT CAUSED HIS OWN DEATH

The Indians who came out of the small lake to surrender, more than nine hundred in number, had been kept prisoners by the governor's order and were distributed among the Castilians to act as their servants and to be held as such, as a penalty and punishment for the treason they had committed. This was done solely to intimidate and hold in check the Indians of the vicinity where the news of the recent action would circulate, so that they would not dare to make another such attempt. The intention, however, was to free and liberate them as soon as they [the Spaniards] should leave their province.

But since Vitachuco, who was held in his house as a prisoner, knew this—and since the poor unfortunate was blind in his passion and thought of nothing else, night and day, except how he could kill the Spaniards—already engulfed in his obstinacy and blindness, it seemed to him that since those nine hundred Indians (according to the story of four little pages who served him, and as was true) were among the noblest, bravest, and chosen men of

all his people, they alone would be enough to do what all of them together had been unable to do, and that each one of them could kill a Castilian, as he himself thought to kill one, for the Indians and the Christians were about equal in numbers. He persuaded himself that at the time the act would be attempted the Indians would have an advantage over the Christians because it would be when all of them were eating and off their guard, and also because they would not be suspicious of men who had surrendered and become slaves, and were unarmed. And as he imagined this mad action, so he precipitated himself into it, without considering whether the Indians were prisoners or free, or whether they had arms or not, it appearing to him that as he himself had no lack of weapons, consisting of his own strong arms, so would all his men have them.

Vitachuco communicated this precipitate and mad determination through his four pages to the leaders among the nine hundred Indians, ordering that on the third day thereafter, precisely at noon, each one of them be ready to kill the Spaniard who had fallen to his lot as master; at the same hour he himself would kill the governor. They were to keep this a secret, passing the word from one to another, and as a signal to begin, at the moment he killed the general he would give a shout so loud that it would be heard throughout the pueblo. Vitachuco gave this command on the same day that the governor had reproved him and restored him to his friendship and favor, from which is seen the manner in which the ungrateful and unappreciative return benefits that are conferred upon them.

Although they saw the hopelessness of the thing their cacique sent them orders to do, the poor Indians obeyed and replied, saying that they would do what they were ordered with all their strength or die in the attempt.

The Indians of the New World have so much veneration, love and respect for their kings and lords that they obey and adore them not as men but as gods; if they so command, they throw themselves into the fire as readily as into the water, because they have no regard for life or death except in compliance with the precepts of their lord, in which their happiness consists. Because of this religion, for they regard it as such, they obeyed Vitachuco so implicitly that they did not reply a word.

Seven days after the recent skirmish and defeat, at the moment when the governor and the cacique had finished eating—for in order to win his friendship the general did him all the favors possible—Vitachuco rose from the chair in which he had been seated and, turning his body from one side to the other, he extended his arms to either side with the fists closed, and then brought them together until the fists were on the shoulders; from there he

shook them once and twice with such force and violence that the bones and joints crackled like broken reeds. This he did to call up and summon his strength for what he intended to do, which is an ordinary thing and almost second nature to the Indians of La Florida when they wish to perform some feat of strength.

Having done this, then, Vitachuco got on his feet with all the bravado and fury that could be imagined and in an instant closed with the adelantado, at whose right hand he had been eating, and, grasping him by the collar with his left hand, he struck him such a hard blow with his right fist over the eyes, nose and mouth that he knocked him senseless on his back, overturning his chair, as if he had been a child. In order to finish killing him, he fell upon him with such a loud roar that it could be heard for a quarter of a league round about. The gentlemen and soldiers who happened to be at the general's table, seeing him so mistreated and his life in such danger through so strange and unexpected an action, grasped their swords and fell upon Vitachuco, and ten or twelve of them transfixed his body at the same moment, with which the Indian fell dead, blaspheming the heavens and the earth for not having succeeded in his evil purpose.

These gentlemen succored their captain in such good time and to such good effect that if they had not been present to defend him or had delayed a moment with their aid, allowing the Indian to strike him another blow, he would have succeeded in killing him, for the one that he did give was so severe that the governor did not regain consciousness for more than half an hour, and he was bleeding at the eyes, nose, mouth, gums, and upper and lower lips as if he had been struck with a large club. His teeth and jaws were so injured that the former were about to come out, and for more than twenty days he could not eat anything that had to be chewed, but only soft food. His face, especially the nose and lips, were so swollen that he had to apply plasters to them continuously during the twenty days. As we have said, Vitachuco showed himself so terrible and so strong in the manner of his death that it is clear that the strange threats and menaces he made from the beginning had arisen from this bravado and fierceness of spirit, which was so excessive that it did not admit the consideration, prudence, and counsel that great actions require.

Juan Coles adds, besides what we have said about the blow, that the governor lost two teeth on account of it.

## XXIX

### OF THE STRANGE BATTLE THE CAPTIVE INDIANS HAD WITH THEIR MASTERS

At the sound of the cacique's voice, which as we said he had given his vassals as the signal for the desperate act that caused his death, and theirs, there took place in the camp between the Indians and the Spaniards encounters no less cruel and horrible than laughable. Hearing the cacique's shout, each Indian fell upon his master to kill or wound him, carrying as weapons blazing sticks or other things that came to hand, for in the absence of those [arms] that they wished for, they converted into offensive arms whatever they found before them.

Many of them threw in their master's faces the pots containing their food, which, as they were boiling, burned some of them. Others fell upon them with plates, porringers, jugs and pitchers; others with benches, chairs and tables where they had them, and with anything else that came to hand, although it served only to show their desire to kill them, so that everyone can imagine what would happen under such circumstances.

They did more damage with the burning sticks than with other weapons, and it may be that they had prepared them for the purpose, because most of the Indians carried them. One Indian gave his master a blow on the head with a firebrand and laid him at his feet, and then knocked him senseless with two or three other blows. Many Spaniards had their eyebrows burned and their noses and arms injured by blows from firebrands; others received hard fist-cuffs and buffets and blows from rocks or sticks, according to what fell to their lot in such an unseemly brawl as they found confronting them unexpectedly in their own houses.

One Indian, after mistreating his master with blows from a stick and fist-cuffs in his face, on fleeing from the other Spaniards who came to his rescue, went up a ladder to an upper apartment, taking with him a lance he found leaning against the wall, and he defended the door with it so that no one could enter.

At this shout a gentleman, who was a relative of the governor, named Diego de Soto, came up carrying a crossbow ready to shoot and stationed himself in the patio to fire it. The Indian, who did not attempt to save his life but to sell it as dearly as possible, did not try to avoid the shot though he saw the Spaniard aim the crossbow at him. On the contrary, in order to make a



good throw with his lance, he placed himself in front of the door and cast it at the moment that Diego de Soto fired the crossbow. The Indian did not hit him with the lance, but it passed so near his left shoulder that the haft gave him a hard blow, which knocked him to his knees on the ground and drove the lance into it half a fathom, where it remained trembling in the earth. Diego de Soto made a better shot than the Indian, whom he struck in the breast and killed.

Seeing the effrontery and boldness of the Indians and what bad condition the governor was in as a result of the blow given him, the Spaniards lost patience and began to kill and wreak vengeance upon them, especially those who had been hurt with sticks or affronted by blows; these latter in their anger killed the Indians who chanced to be in front of them.

Other Spaniards who had not been assaulted, thinking that it was a thing unworthy of their persons and quality to kill men who had surrendered and were held in the condition and name of slaves, took them to the plaza and turned them over to the halberdiers of the governor's guard who were there, to be executed; they killed them with their halberds and partisans. In order that the Indian interpreters and others who were serving the army, who had been taken from the provinces already left behind, should be hostages and become the enemies of the rest of the Indians of that country and not dare run away from the Spaniards in the future, they ordered that they shoot arrows at them [the other Indians] and help to kill them, which they did.

A Castilian named Francisco de Saldaña, of small stature and very neat in his person, so that he would not have to kill the Indian who had fallen to his lot when they gave them out as slaves, took him along behind him with a cord fastened around his neck to turn him over to the executioners. When he caught sight of the plaza and saw what was happening there, the Indian had such an excess of courage that he seized his master from behind as he was going along, by the collar with one hand and by the crotch with the other, and raising him up like a child, the Castilian being helpless, he threw him headlong on the ground with such force that he was stupefied, and then jumped on him with both feet in such anger and wrath that he would have torn him to pieces with kicks and blows.

The Spaniards who saw it ran to the rescue with their swords in their hands. The Indian, taking from his master the one [sword] that he was wearing, came out to meet them so fiercely and boldly that though there were more than fifty of them he held them off in a wide circle, using the sword with both hands with such agility of body and desperation of spirit that he showed well his desire and eagerness to kill someone before they should kill

him. The Castilians drew away from him, not wishing to receive injury in killing a desperate man. Thus the Indian kept circling around in every direction attacking everyone, none of them being willing to attack him until they brought weapons with handles with which to kill him.

These and many other similar incidents occurred in this worse than irregular conflict, where four Spaniards were killed and many were badly wounded. And it was fortunate that most of the Indians were in chains and otherwise confined, for if they had been free they would have done still more damage, such was their bravery and spirit. But with all this, though prisoners, they tried to do as much as they could, and therefore they [the Spaniards] killed them all, not leaving one alive, which was a great pity.

Such was the result of the temerity and arrogance of Vitachuco, arising from his spirit that was more fierce than prudent, exceedingly presumptuous and disdainful of advice, which to no purpose whatever caused his own death and that of thirteen hundred of his vassals, the best and noblest in his state. All this was because he had not conferred with some of them as to what to do about the strangers, who, being such, later became his enemies.

He also caused the death of the four good captains who had escaped from the small lake, who were killed along with the other Indians, for the prudent who are subjected to and obliged to obey a madman and do what he orders are in an unfortunate situation, which is one of the greatest calamities that can be suffered in this life.

### XXX

#### THE GOVERNOR GOES TO OSACHILE. AN ACCOUNT OF THE MANNER IN WHICH THE INDIANS OF LA FLORIDA ESTABLISH THEIR PUEBLOS

After the battle we have described, which was laughable, although bloody and cruel for the poor Indians, the governor remained four days in the pueblo of Vitachuco recovering from the injuries he and his men had received. On the fifth day they set out in search of another province, which was near that one, called Osachile.<sup>8</sup> On the first day they marched four leagues and

<sup>8</sup>In the other chronicles the chief of the province of Uçachile was paramount over the entire territory between Aguacaleyquen and Apalache, that is, over the Timucuan territory misnamed "Ochile" and "Vitachuco" by Garcilaso. Hann, "De Soto, Dobyns, and Demography," 6. See note 4.

camped on the bank of a large river that forms the boundary line of these two provinces. In order to cross it, it was necessary to build another bridge like that which was built on the Río de Ochile, because it could not be forded.

The Castilians having made the board platform to be put over the water, the Indians assembled on the opposite bank to oppose the work and the crossing. Stopping their work on the bridge, the Christians made six large rafts on which a hundred men crossed, including crossbowmen, harquebusiers, and fifty armed cavalymen, who carried the saddles of their horses on the rafts.

When these had reached the opposite bank, the governor (who, though his face was bandaged, took part in everything) ordered fifty horses driven into the river, and they swam across.

The Spaniards who were on the other side, having received and saddled them, went out on the plain as quickly as possible. Seeing horses in a place clear of timber, the Indians abandoned their post and left the Christians free to build their bridge, which they put out on the water, and with their accustomed diligence they finished it in a day and a half.

The army crossed the river, marched two leagues through a country without timber, and at the end of the march found large fields of maize, beans, and calabashes of the kind called in Spain *romana*. With the fields began the settlement of scattered houses, separated from one another without the order of a pueblo, and these continued for a space of four leagues as far as the chief pueblo, called Osachile. It contained two hundred large and good houses and was the seat and court of the curaca and lord of that land, who had the same name of Osachile.

The Indians, who throughout the two leagues of open and level country had not dared to wait for the Spaniards, as soon as they saw them among the cultivated fields turned upon them, and from the cover of the maize fields they shot many arrows at them, attacking from all sides and losing no time, place, or occasion that presented itself where they could do them damage. They wounded many Castilians by this means, but neither did the Indians have reason for rejoicing, because the Christians, recognizing the bold and rabid courage the Indians showed for killing or wounding them and opposing their explorations, speared them without sparing anyone; they took very few prisoners. Thus this desperate game continued throughout the four leagues of the cultivated fields, with losses now on one side and now on the other, as always happens in war. From the pueblo of Vitachuco to that of Osachile there are six leagues of level and pleasant country.

The Spaniards found the pueblo of Osachile abandoned, for the curaca

and his Indians had gone to the woods. The governor immediately sent messengers to him from among the few Indians they had captured in his country, offering him peace and friendship. But the curaca Osachile neither came out nor replied to the messages, nor did any of the Indians whom they had sent return. It might have been because of the short time that the Christians were in their pueblo, which was only two days. During this time, by placing themselves in ambush, the Spaniards captured many Indians to use as servants. After they gave themselves up they were domestic and gave good service, though with arms in their hands they had shown themselves to be fierce enough.

Because of the short time that the Spaniards were in this province and because it was small, though well populated with people and supplied with food, few things occurred worthy of recounting other than those already mentioned. Therefore it will be appropriate, in order not to leave it so soon, for us to describe the site, plan, and appearance of this pueblo Osachile so that from it may be seen the plan and form of the rest of the pueblos of this great kingdom called La Florida; because since the whole country is of almost the same plan and quality—flat, with many rivers flowing through it—so all its natives live, dress, eat, and drink in about the same way. Even in their heathenism, in their idolatries, rites, and ceremonies (of which they have few), and in their arms, condition, and ferocity, they differ little or none from one another. Thus having seen one pueblo we have seen almost all, and it will not be necessary to describe them separately unless one appears so different that it requires an account of its own.

Therefore it is to be noted that the Indians of La Florida always endeavor to live on a high point, at least in the case of the houses of the caciques and lords when the whole pueblo cannot do so. And because the whole country is very flat, and an elevated site is seldom found that has the other conveniences useful and necessary for a settlement, they make it by their own labor.<sup>9</sup> Amassing a very large quantity of earth, they pack it down by tread-

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<sup>9</sup>This remarkable passage describing general Mississippian mound construction and the ideal village layout is not duplicated in the other De Soto narratives and is the earliest on record. Moreover, its essential accuracy, except for the apparently exaggerated number of buildings claimed for the mound's summit, is confirmed many times over in archaeological investigations throughout the Southeast. For an archaeological example conforming to this plan, see Richard R. Polhemus, *The Toqua Site: A Late Mississippian Dallas Phase Town*, Report of Investigations No. 41 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, Department of Anthropology, 1987). For a defense of Garcilaso on this and other ethnographic particulars, see John R. Swanton, "Ethnological Value of the De Soto Narratives," *American Anthropologist* 34, no. 4 (1932):576-77.

ing on it, raising it up in the form of a hill two or three pike-lengths in height. On top they make a level space large enough for ten, twelve, fifteen, or twenty houses for the dwellings of the lord and his family and the people in his service, in accordance with his ability and the grandeur of his state. On the plain at the foot of the hill, natural or artificial, they make a square plaza corresponding to the size of the pueblo that is to be settled, surrounding which the nobles and chief men build their houses. Then the rest of the common people build theirs, endeavoring not to be too far from the hill where the lord's house is; they try rather to surround his with their own.

In order to go up to the curaca's house they make streets straight up the hill, two, three, or more as are needed, fifteen or twenty feet wide. For walls of these streets they drive thick logs into the ground, one after the other, which are sunk into the earth more than an *estado* deep. [An *estado* is a unit of measure about the height of an average man.—CS] For stairways they place other logs no less thick at right angles to those that form the walls, and join them together. These logs that form the stairs are planed on all four sides so that the ascent will be smoother. The risers are four, six, or eight feet from one another, according to the incline and steepness of the hill and its height. The horses could ascend and descend them easily because they were broad. All the rest of the hill, besides the stairs, they cut off in the form of a wall so that it is not possible to ascend it, and in this way the lord's house is better fortified. In this form and plan Osachile had his pueblo and house, which he abandoned because the forest seemed safer to him. There he remained without being willing to accept the friendship of the Spaniards or to reply to their messages.